New York City School Library System Office of Library Services

Exploratorium – May 18, 2011 NYC Department of Education

**Title:** TheMale of the Species: Recreational Reading, Non-Fiction, and Male High School Students

**Audience level:** High School

**Presenter:**

Robert S. Nelson

Fort Hamilton High School

8301 Shore Road

Brooklyn, NY 11209

Library Web site: <http://library.nycenet.edu/common/welcome.jsp?site=4600>

E-mail**:** [rnelson2@schools.nyc.gov](mailto:rnelson2@schools.nyc.gov)

**Description, Goals, Intended Outcomes:**

The recreational reading culture at Fort Hamilton High School is extremely active, but seemed to be biased towards female Young Adult literature. While there is an engaged male reading population, they are a minority and tended towards the standard science fiction, fantasy, and horror genres. In an effort to increase circulation of the new non-fiction and to support the Common Core Standards, this project was developed and implement over the course of the early academic year. Through dramatic readings, displays, and consultations the number of new non-fiction titles circulated to male students has increased.

This project sought to engage and expand the range of recreational reading amongst the male population by providing access to and promoting current literary non-fiction that is appealing to this demographic. While there are many new fiction titles that would appeal to male readers, there is a decided and obvious trend in Young Adult literature towards female readers. With the proliferation of series such as Twilight, Pretty Little Liars, and other similar titles, male readers may feel that their choices are limited. By analyzing observational and anecdotal evidence, it was apparent that many male readers were at risk of become pigeon-holed in regards to the reading habits. The main goal of this project was to offer, in a creative and fun way, male recreational readers the option of reading new literary non-fiction that would appeal to them.

While an increase in circulation of new titles and assisting students in meeting and exceeding the Common Core Standards were obvious intended outcomes of this project, the true intended to outcome was to broaden the reading horizons of the male recreational reading population. Often, students within this demographic will not venture far from what they are comfortable reading and that tends to be horror, science fiction, and mystery. While reading these genres is not, by any means, frowned upon, it is limiting these students in their view of the world and their ability to engage in more intelligent conversations. If these students are exposed to and consume literary non-fiction, they may be more likely to engage in academic discussions in classes such as history or English. They may also be more interested in pursuing knowledge in areas such as biology or history.

**Process to Develop and Implement this Project:**

The planning process began by analyzing circulation trends, anecdotal observations at the reference desk, and discussions with the students. A clear trend towards female-centric Young Adult literature was evident. The male recreational reading population, while active, was less emphatic and decidedly unwilling to venture beyond their comfort zones of science fiction, fantasy, and horror. This was seen as a challenge and the project took root.

In consultation with several English teachers, a plan to promote literary non-fiction via library-instruction was developed. Relying on personal reading experience, book reviews, and consultations with students, a collection of non-fiction books was either purchased or culled from the existing collection. During class visits, selections from these titles were read, in a dramatic fashion with an audio-visual accompaniment, at the opening of the class. These readings served to set the stage for catalog demonstrations and recreational reading selections.

**Budget:** No budget impact outside of the purchasing of titles via NYSTL funding.

**Timeline:**

**Early October 2011** Trends in circulation habits among male recreational readers begin to appear

**Mid-October 2011** Plans to counter-trends considered

**Early November 2011** Books associated with the project acquired

**Mid-November 2011** Orientations, readings, displays developed and deployed

**Late November 2011** Conversational follow-ups with students begin

**December 2011 – Present** Analysis of circulation data and additional follow-ups conducted

**Evidence of Outcomes, Possible Adaptations, and Lessons Learned:**

While the process of analyzing the data is ongoing, it is clear through anecdotal and observational evidence that the male recreational reading population has been impacted by these efforts. Circulation of literary non-fiction has increased in relation to the targeted demographic. Students have been noted discussing the books in small groups and books have been traded amongst a core group of students. The general outcome of this project seems to be met. There is an increase in recreational reading of literary non-fiction amongst the male population and that reading has been sparking clear and cogent conversations about a variety of topics.

This project has applications well beyond the targeted population and level. A similar effort was used in a special education environment to some success. Adapting these efforts to the Middle School level would be high advantageous as that it would help develop diverse reading habits at an early age. The gender-based component of this project can also be adapted. Targeting female readers of certain genres and exposing them to similar literary non-fiction would be an interesting parallel.

Peer-group by-in is vital to the success of this project. It is obvious from observation that peer-group recommendations of titles and discussions of the books in question helped fuel circulation amongst the targeted audience. Having multiple copies of the same title was sometimes overlooked and caused some conflicts. It is also important to scaffold the reading for the individual. Personal and empathetic contact with the readers cannot be overlooked as key element to the successful implementation of this project.

**Common Core State Standards addressed:**

Standards for English Language Arts 6-12

Standard 10: Range, Quality, and Complexity of Student Reading

**Skills taught:**

While skills such as critical analysis of literature and applying recreational reading to academic situations are ancillary skills taught by this project, skill-sets were not the primary foci of this project.

**Assessments:**

Anecdotal and observational assessments were conducted among the targeted population. Analysis of circulation statistics to identify trends towards and away from previously observed patterns also served as an assessment of the project’s efficacy. More formalize assessments will be implemented next year when this project moves from the pilot to full implementation stage.

**Resources Used:**

**Selected and Suggested Titles**

|  |
| --- |
| Boukreev, Anatoli. Above the clouds: the diaries of a high-altitude mountaineer. 1st ed. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2001.  Bugliosi, Vincent. Helter skelter: the true story of the Manson murders. 25th Anniversary ed. New York: W.W. Norton, c1994.  Capstick, Peter Hathaway. Death in the long grass. New York: St. Martin's Press, c1977.  Capuzzo, Mike. Close to shore: the terrifying shark attacks of 1916. 1st trade pbk. ed. New York: Broadway Books, 2002, c2001.  Larson, Erik. The devil in the white city: murder, magic, and madness at the fair that changed America. 1st ed. New York: Crown Publishers, c2003.  Larson, Erik. Isaac's storm: a man, a time, and the deadliest hurricane in history. 1st Vintage Books ed. New York: Vintage Books, 2000, c1999.  Larson, Erik. Thunderstruck. 1st ed. New York: Crown Publishers, c2006.  Parenti, Michael, 1933-. The assassination of Julius Caesar: a people's history of ancient Rome. New York: New Press, 2003.  Philbrick, Nathaniel. In the heart of the sea: the tragedy of the whaleship Essex. New York: Penguin, 2001, c2000.  Philbrick, Nathaniel. The last stand: Custer, Sitting Bull, and the Battle of the Little Bighorn. New York: Viking, 2010.  Philbrick, Nathaniel. Mayflower: a story of courage, community, and war. New York: Viking, 2006.  St. George, Judith. The duel: the parallel lives of Alexander Hamilton & Aaron Burr. New York: Viking, 2009.Bottom of Form |